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Government book control

By Geoffrey Wolff

"Words are loaded pistols," says Sartre, and official voices in this country have come to fully acknowledge this dictum. In the months before the 1964 election, for example, 18 of our 50 Senators were working on one or more books, most of which would be ghost-written and published under their names. The publish or perish syndrome is even more prevalent in the executive branch: we have had platoons of books and non-books about the Peace Corps, introduced by Sargent Shriver; the Defense Department has been endlessly chronicled, as have NASA, the diplomatic corps, the Internal Revenue Service, and the rest of the Establishment's interests. A story often heard in Washington has President Kennedy looking ahead to the 1964 election and huddling with his lieutenants to come up with a campaign issue. In one of the meetings, the story goes, he asked if there was anything of substance in Michael Harrington's study of poverty, *The Other America*. Assured that there was, Kennedy called for memorandums, documents, and ideas. Shortly thereafter, poverty books came forth by the dozens—many written by persons who were part of or close to the Administration. Magazine articles followed; silence and ignorance gave way to public clamor; an issue was born, and the War on Poverty began.

In principle, there is nothing alarming about public officials generating books to further their political ideals and careers. In practice, however, political expediency has made many writers so arrogant that they scorn facts and ignore their duty to learn and the reader's right to know. There is much evidence that books are used increasingly as engines of propaganda, that highly-placed persons are pre-censoring books they find repellent or embarrassing, and that they are commissioning and controlling the writing of books without disclosing the facts of such control. If we believe that truth has a more exclusive claim to our attention than partial truth or falsehood, and if we believe that openness and disclosure of the circumstances surrounding the writing, publishing, and marketing of a book are requisites of a free access to ideas, then we must be alarmed at the sham, illegality, and indirection that have infected much of what is sold as objective reality.

Recently, for example, Mr. George Carver wrote for the highly respected periodical *Foreign Affairs* an article supporting our official policy toward North and South Viet Nam. Mr. Carver is with the C. I. A. but this crucial information was not related by *Foreign Affairs*. Worse, it is possible it was not given to the magazine. It is illegal for the C. I. A. to operate as an intelligence-gathering or intelligence-disseminating organization in the United States. The same restrictions apply to U. S. I. A., which is bound to confine itself to propaganda activities abroad. Yet its officers admitted several months ago in hearings before a sub-

committee of the House Committee on Appropriations that part of the activity of its "Book Development Program" has been the *secret* production of manuscripts, published by private companies which the U. S. I. A. subsidizes, and sold in this country without any government imprimatur or other acknowledgment of the circumstances of their origin.

Reed Harris, appearing before the subcommittee in his capacity as director of the U. S. I. A. Information Center Service, said of these books: "We control the things from the very idea down to the final edited manuscript." Perhaps the books are accurate and valuable, perhaps they are self-serving or meretricious; what is certain is that they do not tell the reader what he surely wants to know: that they are works which the U. S. I. A. admits would never have been written

without Government support and would not have been released by a commercial publishing house without subsidization—either because they were unworthy of publication or they were unmarketable.

Leonard Marks, director of U. S. I. A., and Ben Posner, assistant director, were questioned about the Book Development Program by Congressman Glenard Lipscomb (R-Cal.). Portions of the exchange follow:

Mr. Lipscomb: What were the books that were developed in the 1966 [sic] fiscal year Book Development Program?

Mr. Posner: In fiscal year 1965 there were four books that were developed. *The Ladder Dictionary* by John R. Shaw, *The Sword and the Plow* by Ralph Slater, *President Kennedy in Africa* by Robert Marshall, *The Truth About the Dominican Republic* by Jay Mallin . . . We will be pleased to make this information available to the committee. Because it has not been our policy to make our support known in connection with these items, the material that I have is not for the record, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Lipscomb: Do I understand that this list is considered as classified?

Mr. Posner: In the sense that we have not in the past divulged the Government's connection with it, yes sir.

Mr. Lipscomb: Are any of these books on this classified list distributed and sold within the United States?

Mr. Posner: I believe that they are; yes.

Mr. Marks: In other words, we assist.

At this juncture Mr. Marks agreed to put in the record the titles of the books and the cost, \$90,258, of commissioning manuscripts and supporting the publication of books commissioned by private publishers. The taxpayer who buys one of these books pays for it three times: he pays to have it written; he pays to have it published, and he pays its retail price at the bookstore. He also pays to support a Government

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